

Louis Lista
Testimony for Labor and Public Employees Committee
HB 6187

To the members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

My name is Louis Lista. I live in Hartford and I am the owner and manager of the Pond House Café located in Elizabeth Park in Hartford. I am also a member of CBIA, the Connecticut Business and Industry Association.

The Pond House opened in 1999. Like a lot of restaurants, when we first opened we wanted to keep operating costs as low as possible. This meant very few benefits for employees, no healthcare and no sick days. We learned pretty quickly, however, whatever we were saving by not providing those benefits we ended up spending on employee turnover. The restaurant industry is known for this, and with good reason. Without providing some of those benefits, we had no way to attract and retain staff. Sure, we could usually find new employees to replace the ones who left, but it took time and money away from other things we could have been doing to promote the businesses.

So a couple of years later in 2003 we decided to take another look at the issue of providing benefits like sick days and healthcare. We began offering those benefits and pretty soon we could see the difference it made in terms of attracting dedicated staff people and keeping them happy. Instead of needing to replace employees every month or so, our staff began to see their job at the pond house as a career. Right now we have some employees who have been on staff for 8-10 years or more. We even have dishwashers who have been on for over 6 years.

If I were to look back on the past six years I think our initial assumption that providing these benefits would be too costly, wasn't quite right. I didn't realize then how much turnover was a drag on our cost structure and how that cost could be reduced by providing decent benefits for employees.

Paid sick days has a few other important benefits for our business. First, encouraging employees to stay home when they are sick reduces the spread of illnesses in the workplace. I would rather have one employee stay home for a day or two than have half of my staff catch the flu. This is especially true in a business where people prepare and handle food all day. The last thing I would want would be to infect customers by making sick people cook their food.

Lastly, I think this is just the right thing to do for my peace of mind. I just think that people should be able to go to the doctor when they're sick. They shouldn't have to come to work and expose other workers and customers to their germs. CBIA says that providing this kind of benefit is too expensive for some employers. For some maybe that's true, but I think most businesses would experience the same results as mine: lower turnover costs and higher quality staff. For me, the benefit for our business and the public benefit, easily outweighs the cost.

I hope the members of this committee and the legislature and Governor will support HB 6187. Thank you.